

Town of Amherst Planning Board Zoning Subcommittee
Meeting of Wednesday, August 3, 2011
Town Hall, Town Room

Member attendance: Jonathan O'Keeffe, Bruce Carson, Richard Roznoy, Rob Crowner

Staff: Jonathan Tucker, Christine Brestrup, Jeff Bagg

Members of the public: Diana Stein, Cinda Jones, Sarah LaCour, Jim Wald, Scott Merzbach, Aaron Hayden, Hilda Greenbaum, Louis Greenbaum

1. Announcements and minutes.

Mr. O'Keeffe calls the meeting to order at 5:03pm. The meeting is being recorded for Amherst Media. The minutes of the July 6, 2011 meeting are **approved** as submitted by a 4-0 vote.

2. Village Center planning projects.

Mr. O'Keeffe briefly recaps the public presentations of concept plans for North Amherst and Atkins Corner village centers made by The Cecil Group on July 25 and 26. Mr. Tucker reviews the draft "zoning strategy and framework" recently received from The Cecil Group. It envisions two new village center form districts and several subdistricts within each. Form-based standards would be added to Article 4 of the zoning bylaw as a new development method alongside OSCD, etc. The use table and the dimensional regulations table would also be amended. Form-based standards would apply to the edge of the ED zone where it borders the village center in South Amherst (this is already the case for dimensional regulations). Not yet determined is whether the use chart would include separate columns for each subdistrict.

Discussion revealed uncertainty within the committee about the distinction between concept maps showing land use subdistricts and areas with form standards: How do they work together? Why do they not match up more precisely? Mr. Tucker explained that there would be general form standards for the entire village center, with subdistricts having slight differences based on expected use. Two sets of regulating layers would allow regulation of use where use is important and regulation of form where form is important. Form standards areas are related to distance from traffic corridors. The committee requested that concept maps be simplified and integrated, and that currently undesignated subdistrict areas within the North Amherst village center be incorporated in proposed subdistricts.

Ms. Jones requested that the west side of the commercial zone along Sunderland Road not be downzoned from COM and that existing forms not conforming to the new standards be grandfathered and allowed to expand in kind on-site. She prefers using existing districts (B-VC, B-N) rather than new zones to reorganize the area. The committee discussed the kinds of changes that would be "encouraged" rather than "required" by new zoning, and whether architectural style would be part of a form-based code alongside orientation, massing, etc.

Mr. Hayden stated that complicated rezoning can be successful at Town Meeting and advised the committee to focus on the object being sought.

Mr. Greenbaum cautioned about nostalgia coming into conflict with the "radical new" (zoning) and urged the committee not to rush it but to "get it right".

Ms. LaCour suggested matching the proposed land use subdistricts to existing zones rather than trying to convince people that form-based code is not about use.

Mrs. Greenbaum requested clarification about how and by whom various uses would be permitted under form-based zoning, advocating for a similar level of citizen oversight as currently exists. She recommends using photographs to make the zoning proposal less abstract.

Mr. Tucker stated that form-based code can include detailed design standards but does not have to. Ms. Brestrup said that form based code often focused on larger issues of form, massing, setbacks,

and so forth, rather than on architectural detail.

Mr. Roznoy said he would like to see more explicit provision for public transit in the new zoning so that future transportation initiatives do not have to work around roadways built for cars. Mr. Tucker states that the form standards will be built around and conscious of the existing right-of-way, which is controlled by the town. Zoning cannot compel property owners or the town to create a transportation hub.

Ms. Jones stated that stakeholders have discussed both alternative circulation options based on the Mill River/Eastman Brook corridors and possible "public use transit" on private property, though it would be premature to include these in plans.

Mr. Bagg suggested using form standards as incentives for permitting different uses.

Mr. Tucker stated that another public workshop will be held at the end of August or beginning of September and that additional public outreach will take place after that and prior to Town Meeting.

3. 2011 Fall STM zoning amendments.

Mr. Tucker distributed a "first look" revision of Special Permit and Site Plan Review criteria, which grew out of the committee's discussion of implementing performance standards as part of development modification at the last meeting. This could be a future zoning article.

4. Next meetings.

The committee agreed to meet on August 17 and August 31. Scheduling of public hearings for this Fall Town Meeting's zoning articles will be a priority.

5. Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 6:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner